



## Ethno-archaeological Study of Megalithic Tradition in Sikkim

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**Abstract:** Megaliths and megalithic culture are an important part of the cultural heritage of Northeast India, where stone monuments remain closely linked with social life, rituals, beliefs, and traditions. These monuments symbolize the relationship between people, memory, and material culture across the region.

Sikkim, one of the northeastern states of India, preserves a rich megalithic tradition among its three major ethnic groups — the Lepcha, Bhutia, and Nepali. The megaliths found in the state can be broadly classified into monolithic and polyolithic types. They differ in size, shape, and arrangement, reflecting the use of locally available stone and indigenous construction knowledge. In Sikkim, megaliths mainly serve socio-cultural, religious, and commemorative purposes. They are associated with rituals, festivals, community gatherings, ancestor remembrance, deity worship, and expressions of identity and collective memory. These traditions are especially visible in the ritual practices of the Lepcha, Bhutia, and Nepali communities. This paper studies the megalithic tradition of Sikkim through an ethno-archaeological perspective. The study is qualitative in nature. Data were collected primarily from field and gazetteers, books, journal articles provided the secondary information. The paper tries to provide an overall understanding of the living megalithic tradition of Sikkim.

**Keywords:** Megaliths, material culture, ethnoarchaeology, rituals.

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## Introduction

Megalithic culture is one of the most widespread and enduring cultural phenomena in human history. The term megalith is derived from the ancient Greek words, *me*gas

meaning large and *lithos* is stone, which generally refers to monuments constructed of stone and sometimes with other materials like bamboo and wood (Bhuyan and Sangma, 2019). Megalithic culture refers to a tradition characterized by the construction of large stone structures, often used for funerary or other purposes (Marak, 2019) such as memorial or commemorative stone, resting stone, stone seat, religious stone, watch tower, boundary stone, judiciary stone, recreational stone, market stone, path stone, spiritual stone, purificatory stone, fetish or luck stone, stones symbolising head hunting and animal killings etc. (Marak, 2012; Mitri, 2019; Mepusangba and Changkiri, 2019). However, the term "megaliths" does not always exclusively refer to large stones (Marak, 2012) but also small stones (Yondri, 2006) erected for particular purposes as referred by van der Hoop and Wagner (Yondri, 2019). These monuments, having diverse sizes and shapes, can serve various functions. Kamei et al. (2024) stated that "The standing stones are not just simple structures made of earth or stone. They embody the social memories of the past and serve as a symbol of the community's identity".

Across different parts of the world, megaliths have appeared in varied forms such as menhirs, dolmens, cairns, stone circles, alignments, cists etc. They are found in Europe, Africa, West and South Asia, Southeast Asia, the Pacific, and in several parts of India viz., peninsular India, central India, the Himalayan region, and the Northeast (Bezbaruah, 2003; Bora, 2023). The widespread erection of stone monuments has been a recurring human response to ritual, mortuary, territorial, and memorial needs. Although differing in form and chronology, megaliths everywhere embody the relationship between people, landscape, memory, and belief systems (Kamei et al, 2024).

Northeast India preserves vibrant megalithic traditions among several communities such as the Khasi (Mitri, 2019), Jaintia (Meitei, 2020), Garo (Marak, 2012, 2019), Naga (Jamir, 2019), Mizo (Malsawmliana, 2017; Sarkar, 2025), Karbi (Choudhury, 2012; Sarma, 2010; Rabha and Gogoi, 2024; Thakuria and Singh, 2019; Thakuria, 2022), Poumai and Maram (Devi, 2019), Tiwa (Patar and Hazarika, 2023), Lepcha (Lepcha, 2019; Thakuria, 2023), Hrusso (Gogoi and Baruah, 2021), and others. Here, these standing stones are deeply integrated with kinship, clan identity, agricultural rituals, feasting traditions, ancestor veneration, and territorial memory. Unlike many other regions where megaliths survive only as archaeological remains, in Northeast India they often remain active components of social and ritual life (Marak, 2019). This makes the region a valuable cultural zone for examining

continuity, change, symbolism, and indigenous knowledge systems associated with stone monuments.

Sikkim, one of the Northeastern states of India, occupies a distinctive position in the living megalithic tradition. Though comparatively less documented in megalithic studies, the state preserves a significant tradition of stone monuments among its three major ethnic groups— the Lepcha, Bhutia, and Nepali. These stone structures are associated with deity worship, agricultural rites, seasonal festivals, community gatherings, and expressions of identity. In Sikkim, megaliths are therefore not silent stones of the past; they remain embedded in living religious and cultural practices.

In archaeological discourse, megalithic culture is often associated with prehistoric and proto-historic periods, particularly with the transition to settled life, agriculture, metallurgy, and increasing social complexity. The megalithic horizon is closely linked with the Iron Age. The use of iron technology, organized burial practices, and the erection of stone monuments together mark an important cultural stage in early societies (Park & Shinde, 2013; Thakur, 2021).

In Northeast India, however, the megalithic tradition differs significantly from the Iron Age megalithic culture of peninsular India. Scholars have pointed out that the erection of stone monuments in this region — often associated with the commemoration of important personalities, ancestors, or social events — remains poorly understood in terms of its origin and chronology (Hazarika, 2017). Rao argues that the social and ideological dimensions of different megalithic cultures must be carefully examined before suggesting any cultural affinity or common origin (Rao, 1991).

Archaeological evidence from sites such as Garbhanga Reserve Forest and Bargaon, Assam reveals the coexistence of iron artefacts and menhirs, particularly among the Karbis (Hazarika, 2017). Chronologically, the megalithic culture of the Northeastern region is considered post-Neolithic, where the knowledge of metallurgy or the simple use of metal may have facilitated the construction of these monuments. Scientific dating further indicates a relatively recent antiquity for these traditions. For instance, a menhir at Marakdola in the Khasi Hills yielded a C14 date of  $1296 \pm 100$  BP (Rao, 1991), while kaolin potsherds recovered from the foundation trench of another menhir in the same region were OSL dated to around the fifteenth century A.D. These findings suggest that the megalithic culture of Northeast India flourished roughly within the last thousand years, a conclusion also supported by oral traditions associated with the Jaintia and Kachari kingdoms (Marak, 2019).

Northeast India lacks well-defined Early and Middle Pleistocene archaeological evidence, making its Palaeolithic cultural sequence uncertain. However, Late Pleistocene– Early Holocene stone assemblages suggest a distinct prehistoric tradition that shows affinities with Hoabinhian or related Southeast Asian industries (Hazarika, 2012, 2013). Similarly, Sikkim's archaeological findings show the tool typology indicates two Neolithic phases: an early phase with chipped and edge-ground tools, and a later phase with pecked, edge-ground, and fully polished tools. The early phase resembles the Hoabinhian culture of Southeast Asia approximately 10,000 BC, while the later phase shows affinities with South China and Southeast Asia (Mishra, 2008; Subba, 2012).

The archaeological position of Sikkim's megaliths — such as from where and when it actually was — has not yet been fully explored. However, the history of Sikkim is believed to begin with the megalithic tradition of erecting stones at Kabi Longtsaok (Lepcha, 2019) or Kabi Long Chok (Molommu, 2018) or Kabi-Longstok (as per Government of Sikkim, 2001) in North Sikkim, a practice that continues till today among all the major ethnic groups of Sikkim. To study this living tradition, an ethnoarchaeological approach is used as a research strategy. This approach helps in understanding how people select raw materials, construct monuments, use ritual spaces, assign meanings to objects, and transmit traditions across generations.

Ethnoarchaeology is not only a theoretical framework but also a research strategy that integrates methods from both archaeology and ethnography. The term "ethno-archaeology" was first introduced in the early 1900s by Jesse Fewkes, who emphasized the importance of engaging with local traditions and knowledge. This approach aims to gather information that can directly aid in interpreting archaeological findings and addressing related questions. It involves studying contemporary societies using a combination of anthropological observation and archaeological techniques for documenting sites and artifacts (Abdul, 2018). Gould (1968) referred to it as "living archaeology", while David (1992) highlighted its role in establishing a direct connection between humans and their artifacts.

## Study Area

Sikkim, which became the 22nd state of India in 1975, shares international borders with the Tibet Autonomous Region of China to the North and Northeast, Bhutan to the East, Nepal to the West, and West Bengal to the South. The capital of Sikkim is Gangtok. The state was initially divided into four districts: North, South, East



and West. In December 2021, the state underwent reorganization, increasing the number of districts to six. The names of the districts were also changed: North district became Mangen, West was renamed Gyalshing, East became Gangtok, and South was renamed Namchi. Additionally, two new districts, Pakyong and Soreng, were created. This study was conducted based on the earlier four-district division. Sikkim is located at a latitude of 27.3° North and a longitude of 88.3° East (Government of Sikkim, 2021).

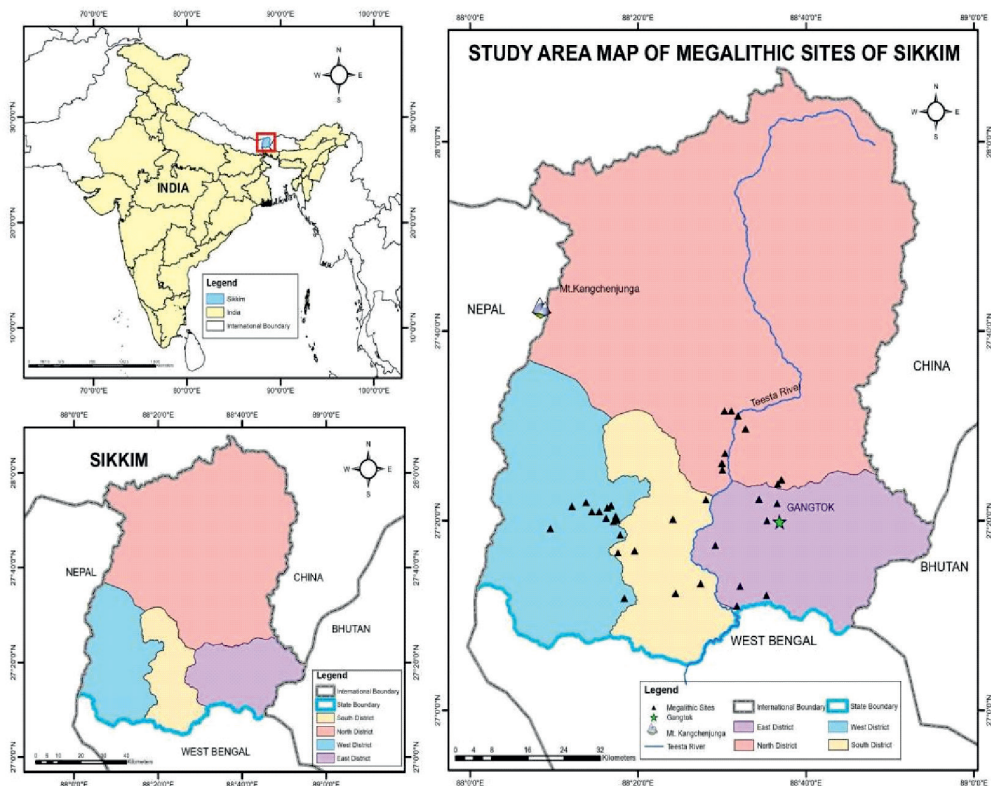


Fig. 1: Map showing locations of the study areas across Sikkim.  
(The Map was prepared on ArcGIS 10.7)

## Methods and Techniques

This study is a descriptive study that uses qualitative approach from an ethnoarchaeological perspective. The data collection methods included archaeological exploration, in-depth interviews with ritual experts, observation and quasi-participation in rituals. The local oral narratives are also analysed. Various

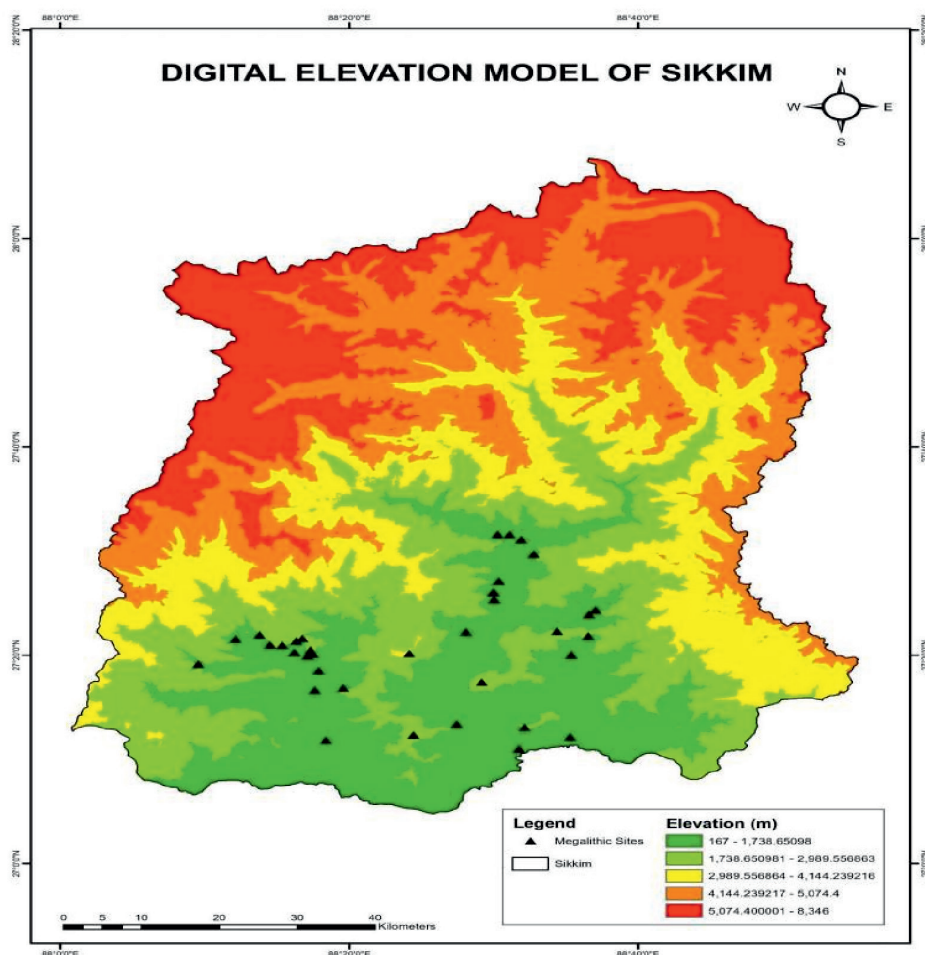


Fig. 2: Digital Elevation Model of the study areas.  
(The Map was prepared on ArcGIS 10.7)

tools, such as scales, sliding callipers, tapes, photography, and videography, were used to examine the morphological features of the megaliths. Secondary sources, including manuscripts, books in both English and vernacular languages, as well as articles from local newspapers, were also used.

## Ritual Practices Associated with Megaliths

### *The Lepcha*

The Lepchas are one of the original inhabitants of Sikkim. They call themselves *Rong* which means “the children of snowy peak or children of God”. The Lepchas believe

that they originated from Mt. Kanchenjunga (Foning, 1987). In Lepcha language, a megalith is known as *longtsaok*, where *long* means stone, and *tsaok* means hard (Lepcha, 2019). The Lepchas primarily use megaliths for ritual purposes, with alignments consisting of three menhirs as the most common type. These stones usually represent to venerate, worship and invoke deities, appease devils and demons, and invoke Gods as well as replicate Mt. Kanchanjunga and other mountain peaks. During rituals, religious scarves known as *khada* in distinct colours — red, blue, green, yellow, and white — are used, representing the five elements: fire, sky, tree, soil, and air respectively. The colourful *khadas* are also seen to be wrapped around the *longtsaok* by the Lepchas while worshipping their Gods and deities.

The rituals are led by a Lepcha shaman, known as *bongthing*, who performs the ceremonies. Offerings such as locally brewed millet drink (*Chee*), raw rice, fruits like apple, banana, guava, and orange, tubers, millet *roti*, buckwheat (*phapar*) *roti*, and sugarcane are offered on banana leaves (Doma & Singh, 2018). These events are organized collectively by the villagers, who gather on the ritual day to celebrate and share a communal feast and enjoy it while dancing and singing. Several common yet significant rituals involve the erection of megaliths as representations of guardian deities, ancestors, revered folkloric figures, and as offerings of gratitude to Mother Nature. These rituals are *Tendong Lho Rum Faat*, *Namsoong*, *Sirim/Chirim*, and *Satap Rum Faat*, which are celebrated across the state in Lepcha-inhabited areas. The details of the rituals are discussed below.

**Tendong Lho Rum Faat:** This is one of the oldest and most significant rituals of the Lepchas, celebrated every year on 8th August, which corresponds to the 3rd month of the Tibetan lunar calendar. According to Lepcha mythology, Mt. Tendong saved the Lepchas from a massive flood that lasted for 40 days. Today, people continue to make offerings seeking protection and safety from the mountain. The ritual involves constructing megalithic monuments as replicas of Mt. Tendong, where the offerings are made.

**Namsoong:** This is the traditional New Year celebration of the Lepcha people, usually observed during the first week of the 11th month of the Lunar Year, which corresponds to the last week of December. This festival symbolizes the victory of good over evil. According to Lepcha mythology, the Lepchas fought a prolonged battle against a powerful evil force and, after twelve years, emerged victorious. *Namsoong*, the first day of first month of the new year, marks the beginning of a new year, symbolizing renewal and the hope for a better and safer future.

**Chirim/Sirim:** This ritual is conducted to safeguard the community from both natural and human-induced disasters. It aims to ensure the overall well-being of the community by preventing accidents, protecting against natural calamities, and fostering agricultural prosperity. This festival is traditionally celebrated twice a year, the first celebration takes place between January and February, while the second is observed between October and December. However, now-a-days, it is celebrated only once a year, typically between January and April. For instance, the people of Mangbrue village in South Sikkim celebrate it annually on 1st April. Similarly, the community in many places of West Sikkim, North Sikkim and South Sikkim still celebrate the ritual only once a year, this change from the previous twice a year timeline, may be because of paucity of time and due to various other work schedules. The occasion is marked by offerings of *Chee* (traditional fermented drink), seasonal fruits and flowers, corn, millet *roti*, and other local produce as a symbol of gratitude and devotion.

**Satap Rum Faat:** It is believed that the practice of this ritual helps prevent hailstorms, protect crops, and ensure a plentiful harvest. *Sanyol Kung*, who is



**Fig. 3: Celebration of Tendong Lho Rum faat, at Gor village, Dzongu, North Sikkim (Fieldwork, 2023).**



**Fig. 4: Celebration of Namsoong, at Lingee village, South Sikkim (Fieldwork, 2024).**



believed to be palm and serves as the guardian of harvests and rain. Every spring between January to March, when the crops are at risk from hailstorm, the *bongthing* offers prayers and makes offerings of seasonal fruits, flowers, corn, earthen lamp, soyabean, millet *roti*, and *Chee*. Devotees offer eggs, rice, mustard oil, cotton etc. seeking protection and prosperity for their crops.



**Fig. 5:** Megaliths where *Sirim/Chirim* is celebrated at Gnog Sangdong, Dzongu North Sikkim (Fieldwork, 2023).



**Fig. 6:** Alignment where *Satap Rum Faat* is offered, Mangbrue, South Sikkim (Fieldwork, 2024).

## The Bhutia

Another major community inhabiting Sikkim is the Bhutia. The term "Bhutia" originates from the Nepali word "*Bhotay*", which refers to the people of Bhot (Tibet). The Bhutias are of Tibetan origin and migrated from southern regions of Tibet, such as Chumbi Valley and Kham, during the 13th century (Bhutia & Mishra, 2014). Following the historic Blood Brotherhood Treaty of 1275 A.D. between the Lepchas and Bhutias, the Bhutias began migrating from Tibet to Sikkim (Subba, 2008). They later established their kingdom in 1642 A.D. (Kharel et al., 2013). Over time, the Bhutias in Sikkim have come to trace their origins not only to Tibet but also to migration from Bhutan (Bhutia & Mishra, 2014). They follow Buddhism, and their

religious life is also associated with a Tibetan shamanic tradition (Doma & Singh, 2018). Although megaliths are not directly a part of their religious practices, yet stone structures are worshipped during a ritual known as *Pang Lhabsol*, which is celebrated jointly with the Lepchas.

**Pang Lhabsol:** Little (2008) stated that the Sikkimese Lepchas observe Buddhist festivals and unique local celebrations such as *Pang Lhabsol*, which honours Mt. Kanchenjunga and commemorates the Lepcha-Bhutia Blood Brotherhood Treaty. This shared cultural tradition is reflected in these stones, which stand to this day at Kabi Longtsaok and continue to receive prayers from both Buddhist monks and the Lepchas (Molommu, 2018). During the Treaty, both the communities pledged an unbreakable bond of friendship. Today, the ritual commemorates that event. Every year, on the 15th day of the 7th month of the Tibetan calendar (usually in August or September), both communities gather to celebrate *Pang Lhabsol*. The name "*Pang Lhabsol*" means "worship of the witness deity". The festival symbolizes the mountain deity's protection and blessings, promotes harmony among the communities, and commemorates the historic treaty. During rituals, sacred scarves known as *khada* are used in five distinct colours— red, blue, green, yellow, and white—each symbolizing one of the five elements: fire, sky, tree, soil, and air, respectively. These colours reflect the harmony and balance of nature that the rituals seek to honour and preserve.

At Kabi Longtsaok, approximately 17 kms north of Gangtok, nine stones were erected as a symbolic representation of Mount Kanchenjunga ranges. These stones still stand upright today and are worshipped during the festival. The site contains a total of 27 megaliths, which can be categorized into three locations for better understanding. Location 1 (L1), situated at the entrance, consists of a cluster of seven menhirs. Location 2 (L2), near the main gate, includes around ten menhirs associated with cairns, termed as cairns-cum-menhirs. Location 3 (L3), which is the main shrine, has approximately ten additional menhirs placed in a broad cairn, also categorized as cairns-cum-menhirs. All these stones are adorned with colourful scarves in white, red, blue, green, and yellow. The megaliths are generally small to medium in size, with shapes varying from cylindrical and rectangular slabs to triangular forms. Most are well- preserved and show minimal weathering, except for the stones in L2, which are more weathered than those in L1 and L3. The stones in L1 have light grey to brown tones, L2 features darker shades such as grey, black, and greenish hues often with algae, while L3 megaliths exhibit no to little weathering,



appearing light brown in colour. The height of these stone monuments ranges from the shortest at 25 cm to the tallest at 112 cm.

Both Buddhist monks and Lepcha shamans play important roles in the rituals. Prayers and offerings are made to the stones, including traditional drinks, rice, corn, sugarcane, flowers, coins, butter lamps, and *khadas* to seek the well-being of the communities. This festival is also celebrated in the monasteries across the state where mask dance is one of the important attributes.



Fig. 7: Locality 1 (L1), at Kabi Longtsaok, North Sikkim (Fieldwork: 2023)

## The Nepali

The Nepalis have a more recent migration history, having arrived in Sikkim during the 19th century as bonded labourers (Sharma, 2023). The term "Nepali" refers to a broad group of around nineteen different communities. According to the Gazetteer of Sikkim 2013, the Nepali population makes up 80% of Sikkim's total population. It states, "the Nepali is a generic category which subsumes a large





Fig. 8: Locality 2 (L2) at Kabi Longtsaok, North Sikkim (Fieldwork: 2023)



Fig. 9: Locality 3 (L3) at Kabi Longtsaok, North Sikkim (Fieldwork: 2023)

number of communities namely the Limboos, Khambu-Rais, Yakhas, Sunuwars, Mangars, Gurungs, Tamangs, Bhujels, Thamis, Bahuns, Chettris, Kamis, Sarkis, Thakuris, Jogis, Sanyasis, Majhis and Newars” (Rai, 2013). However, some of these ethnic groups do not identify themselves as Nepali. The Limbu, for instance, assert that they are not Nepali, as they do not originate from Nepal and possess a distinct ethnic identity characterized by their own language, traditional dress, food culture, and other unique customs (Vandenhelsken & Khamdhak, 2021).

Subba divided the people of Sikkim, excluding the Lepchas and Bhutias, into two broad categories based on their origin: the Ancient *Kiratas*, who are native to the Himalayas, and the *Khasa*, who originally lived in the north-western part of India before migrating to Nepal and Kashmir. The ancient *Kiratas* include the Limboo, Khambu-Rai, Yakha, Sunuwar, Mangar, Gurung, Tamang, Bhujel, and Thami communities. The *Khasa* group consists of Bahun, Chettri, Kami, Dami, Sarki, Thakuri, Jogi, Sanyasi, and Majhi communities (Subba, 2008). In the present context, it was observed from field that groups belonging to the ancient *Kiratas* are

associated with the construction of megaliths for their religious context rather than the *Khasa* groups except the Majhis, who still have rituals associated with megaliths.

The ritual cycle of the Nepali people is associated with agricultural seasons. There are two key agricultural or ecological cycles celebrated primarily among the Rai, Limboo, Yakkha, and Sunuwar. These are *Ubhauli* and *Udhauli*. "*Ubhauli*", meaning "upward migration", marks the beginning of the farming season and movement of grazing animals to higher altitudes in April or May, around *Baisakhi Purnima* according to the lunar calendar. On the other hand, "*Udhauli*", meaning "downward migration", which signifies the end of the harvest season. It is observed in November or December around *Mangsir Purnima*. These rituals are mainly guided through *Mundhum*, which is an oral scripture and religious tradition of the Kirata people, passed down through generations (Subba, 2008).

Megalithic monuments hold great significance in the celebrations of *Ubhauli* and *Udhauli*. The rituals are performed either at existing megaliths or by erecting new ones, which serve as sacred sites of worship. Through these rituals, prayers are offered to the supreme powers of their belief, seeking blessings, protection, and prosperity. While the purpose and manner of these celebrations remain the same, these rituals are known by different names across various Nepali sub-communities. The Rai refer to it as *Sakewa* (summer) and *Sakela* (winter), the Sunuwar call it *Sadar pidar*, the Mangars term it *Barahimijong*, the Bhujels call it *Pughal Parim*, the Thamis name it *Bhume puja*, and the Majhis refer to it as *Ladi puja*.

**Sakewa/Sakela:** This ritual is celebrated among the Rai community. According to legends, *Paruhang* and *Sumnima*, regarded as the ancestors of the Rai people, had three sons: *Chikiwa* (tiger), *Narawa* (bear), and *Henkubang* (human). *Henkubang*, troubled by *Chikiwa's* arrogance, killed him during a forest outing. *Sumnima* revived *Chikiwa* through rituals and, to prevent further conflict, created a sacred stone boundary (*Shila*) that the brothers could not cross, warning of curses if they disobeyed. This act established the tradition of worshipping the stone to ensure harmony and prosperity.

In Raigaon and Bulbuley, East Sikkim, a menhir is permanently installed at a ceremonial ground where rituals are conducted annually on the same site. In Raigaon, the stone stands approximately 160 cm above ground level, which was situated at the top floor of the Paruhang Sapten Mangkhim Research Centre, while in Bulbuley it measures about 120 cm in height. The menhirs are pillar-like in form: the Raigaon stone has a four-sided profile, whereas the Bulbuley stone is

rounded. Both stones exhibit little to no surface weathering. They are composed of metamorphic rock (Winter, 2014; Tewari et al., 2021), with colours ranging from grey to light brown and dark brown.

Among the Rais, a menhir is venerated biannually during the celebration of *Sakewa* and *Sakela*. Their hearth known as *Samkhalung*, which holds deep religious significance for the Rai community, is also worshipped during the ritual. It is made up of three stones, each representing a different group: one symbolizes their male ancestors, another their female ancestors, and the third is dedicated to relatives, non-relatives, and the well-being of the community. The ritual is conducted by their shamans - *Mangpa* (male) and *Mangma* (females). The menhir is decorated with leaves from *Castanopsis spp* locally known as *Kutus*, and small pieces of cloth in yellow, white, red, green, and blue are hung around it. Other offerings such as flowers, sweets, coins, ginger, and rice, are made on a banana leaf. *Sakela* dance is one of the important attributes of the ritual where performers mimic animals, birds, and agricultural activities. The ritual is concluded with a communal feast.

**Shyadar Pidar/Chandi Puja:** *Shyadar* is the goddess worshipped by the Sunuwar or Mukhia people. She is regarded as a protector and provider of sustenance. According to Sunuwar folklore, the goddess gifted them a golden dove as a symbol of prosperity, ensuring they would never experience poverty as long as the bird remained on earth. The goddess is honoured annually through the celebration of *Shaydar Pidar*, which falls in *Buddha Purnima* in April or May. As part of the ritual, an alignment is erected to symbolize the deity. Prayers and offerings are made before these stones, led by their shaman known as the *Poibo* and he performs rituals to honour the land, soil, and nature.

Typically, an alignment consisting of three menhirs is erected temporarily to conduct the ritual. The height of the stones ranges from 15 cm to 35 cm. These are draped with red religious scarves. Offerings such as *trisulas* (tridents), fruits, flowers, lamps, milk, sweets, rice, vermilion powder, areca nuts, and betel leaves are arranged on a banana leaf during the ceremony. The ceremony ends with a communal feast.

**Barahimijong:** This is one of the major rituals of the Mangars. *Barahimijong* made up of two words - "*Barahi*", meaning God, and "*mijong*", meaning salutation. It is a ritual of gratitude to ancestors after the harvest, where it is believed that the harvested crops cannot be consumed until they are first offered to their forefathers.

It is celebrated in December during *Mangsir Purnima*. Three altars are temporarily prepared for performing the ritual. The first altar is a hearth that consists of three stones known as the *Sikari Lung* (for hunters), *Mai Lung*, (for mother) and *Bai Lung* (for father). The second altar is made up of five stones, which represent the five elements (*Pancha Tatva*): earth, air, sky, water, and fire. The third altar has seven tiers made with bamboo: one dedicated to the snake world and ancestors, and the remaining five tiers represent the *Pancha Tatva*.

A group of five small stones has been temporarily set up for the ritual. The heights of the stones vary between 20 cm and 60 cm, and they are shaped like small pillars. Since they are newly placed, their surfaces are fresh and show no signs of weathering. The stones are light brown in colour.

*Kutus Jhiru Mila* and *Titepati* leaves (scientific name: *Artemisia indica*) are important elements for the *Barahimijong* ritual. Other offerings include tubers, ginger, bananas, oranges, apples, millet beer, corn, marigold flowers, and rice, placed on banana leaves. Instead of animal sacrifices, symbolic alternatives like raw eggs (representing animal flesh), red flowers and vermilion powder (representing blood) are used. The Mangar shaman known as *Bhusal* performs the ritual and blesses each devotee by applying white *tilak* (mark of blessing on forehead) using a white raw tuber.

**Pughal Parim:** The ritual is celebrated among the Bhujels, known as *Priti Puja*, and is dedicated to honouring ancestors. As part of this practice, the worshippers also honour nature, following their animist beliefs. They venerate the *Pancha Tatva*, or the five elements of life: earth, water, fire, air, and sky. Traditionally, the Bhujel community used to set up five stones to represent these elements, but now they worship a single stone while preserving the same symbolic significance. This is their traditional way of thanksgiving to their ancestors.

In Jitlang village, East Sikkim, offerings are made by the Bhujels in front of the menhir to show respect and gratitude to their ancestors. *Foro*, who is their shaman, conducts the ritual. The menhir is approximately 45 cm tall, dark brown in colour and oval in shape. The shrine is then covered with banana leaves, and offerings such as *gangajal* (sacred water), flowers, and herbs are placed for purification. Offerings like rice, coins, areca nuts, vermilion, flowers, rice, curd, milk, ghee, honey, and sugar are made. Instead of animal sacrifices, vermilion powder is used to symbolize the blood offering. Incense sticks are lit, and an earthen lamp is placed in front of the stone. The ritual concludes with a communal feast.





**Fig. 10: Celebration of *Sakela*, at Raigaon, East Sikkim (Fieldwork, 2024).**



**Fig. 11: Celebration of *Sakela*, at Bulbuley East Sikkim (Fieldwork, 2024).**



**Fig. 12: *Chulha* stone in *Sakela*, at Bulbuley (Fieldwork, 2024).**



**Fig. 13: *Sakela* Dance, at Bulbuley (Fieldwork, 2024).**





**Fig. 14: Celebration of *Shyadar Pidar*, at Rameng, South Sikkim  
(Photo courtesy: Ashika Mukhia, 2023)**



**Fig. 15: An alignment in *Barahimijong*,  
at Bojogharhi, East Sikkim  
(Fieldwork, 2024).**



**Fig 16: Hearth stones, at  
*Barahimijong* ritual  
(Fieldwork, 2024).**





Fig. 17: Seven tiers altar in *Barahimijong* ritual (Fieldwork, 2024).



Fig. 18: Celebration of *Pughal Parim*, at Jitlang Village, East Sikkim (Fieldwork, 2024)

## Conclusion

Megalithic traditions in Sikkim are not merely remnants of the past but remain active and meaningful components of contemporary social and cultural life. These stone monuments continue to embody ritual practice, social organization, ecological awareness, and ancestral memory among the Lepcha, Bhutia, and various Nepali communities. They serve diverse functions as representations of deities, commemorations of historical events, media of ancestor worship, and sacred centres for communal ceremonies linked with agricultural cycles and seasonal transitions. Although the forms, sizes, and symbolic meanings of the stone monuments vary across communities, they collectively reflect a deep relationship between people, landscape, and belief systems. Unlike many regions where megaliths survive only as archaeological remains, in Sikkim, they continue to be integrated into living traditions and everyday cultural identity.

This cultural continuity makes Sikkim an important cultural zone for understanding the persistence and transformation of megalithic practices in the eastern Himalayan region. At the same time, further archaeological and interdisciplinary research is necessary to establish their chronology, historical development, and wider cultural connections. Overall, the megaliths of Sikkim remain enduring cultural symbols that preserve tradition, strengthen community bonds, and transmit indigenous knowledge across generations.

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